

# THE TEXAS ORATOR



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## The War on Diplomacy

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Yesterday, outgoing CIA Director and former Tea Party member Mike Pompeo testified before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. This past Monday was former United Nations ambassador John Bolton's first day as Donald Trump's third National Security Advisor. Both men have created a political firestorm for their jingoist mindsets. In an era where most of the world resembles a tinderbox, many speculate that this president is bent on pouring gasoline on global hotspots.

Yet, Never-Trumpers would be wise to realize that this is hardly new.

For a number of reasons, the United States over the past quarter-century has been quick to flex its military muscle on the world stage. The blame game is never ending and never helpful. The military-industrial complex may play some role, but defense spending by the federal government remains high regardless of the ebb and flow of international conflict. We may have a militaristically-minded populace, as nearly three-quarters of the American public supported invading Iraq in March 2003, the first month of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

However, neither the defense industry nor the public makes the decision to go to war. It's up to the executive to launch any attack; Congress has some authority but has historically capitulated to the decisions of the president. "Putting boots on the ground" bears enormous costs. Billions of dollars flow away from domestic issues; this necessitates either higher taxes or increased borrowing — both of which wreck political

popularity. American service members are killed or injured — both physical and psychologically — and those casualties have far-reaching consequences for both the obligations of the government and the welfare of society. The costs are extraordinarily high. The benefits are not. The track record of American foreign intervention is horrible. Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya have all been destabilized and require prolonged military commitments. Theoretically, the use of military force can alter the course of conflict for the better. This has yet to be proven historically.

So why do American presidents continue to use hammers to drive screws? The short answer is because they can. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, no other world power has had the ability or will to counteract American overreach. This reduces the calculus of risk by U.S. administrations; when there is little possibility of direct retaliation, any aggressive action becomes relatively more viable.

This is where the “America is falling!” rhetoric comes into play. There are three competing theories for why a great power loses its status, which are largely complementary of each other. The first is over-reach, in which policy blunders abroad undermine the legitimacy of a state. The second is emergence, where rising powers diminish the relative capabilities of the preexisting power. The third — and very popular among the anti-Trump camp — is abdication, where the leadership or electorate of a nation no longer desires global engagement. The “America First” mantra heavily implies a desire to shun obligations to allies and focus on domestic needs; the public sentiment that decries the “world’s policeman” role of America fuels this shift. All three conjectures assess important factors of the changing world order and should be noted by American leadership, especially the hawks that now constitute the president’s inner circle.

While military adventurism may have been relatively plausible in the past, those days are coming to an end. The growing enthusiasm in the grand strategies of Russia, China, Iran, and others should change the calculus in the Situation Room. An American misstep will not be met with a slap on the wrist from a podium within the United Nations. Military action in today’s world is perilous. Diplomacy is imperative. Those who must be cognizant of this fact remain stuck in brazen rhetoric and belief in unchecked American supremacy.

This week is especially indicative of how ill-equipped American foreign policy continues to be. Bolton and Pompeo did not happen overnight. Years of decay of American soft power — the ability of the United States to promote its interests without the use of force — has resulted in a dilapidated State Department guided by a monolithic and outdated security strategy. This week’s additions to the Trump foreign policy circle herald the latest chapter of America’s War on Diplomacy.

Starting with John Bolton, it is hard to find a figure more emblematic of a “shoot first, ask questions later” mindset. Bolton recently wrote an op-ed where he proposes a preventative strike against North Korea while

pretending to care about international law and avoiding any analysis of the consequences. If Donald Trump does follow through with meeting Kim Jong Un, it is hard to imagine how John Bolton would benefit those negotiations. No deliberation can have any hope of being successful if a party signals bad faith from the onset. Would anyone willingly sign a contract or enter a deal where a major player on the other side prioritizes destroying you?

Bolton is all-bluster-no-thought, which goes a long way to explain why Trump selected him but also raises serious concern. However, Bolton is an advisor, which gives him no direct impact on policy, and if the president chooses to ignore him, the national security advisor is effectively useless.

This is not the case for the Secretary of State, who leads America's diplomatic operations. Beyond Mike Pompeo's West Point education and short service as head of the CIA, the nominee demonstrates little aptitude for foreign relations and geopolitics. One key trait that will undermine Pompeo's efforts in engaging with foreign allies is his penchant for Islamophobia. A favorite trope of his is the notion that all Muslims are complicit in terrorism. This belief is questionable at face value as well as clueless to the reality of the Middle East. Pompeo either forgets or blatantly ignores that multiple Muslim-majority nations joined the U.S.-led coalition in fighting ISIS.

Moreover, Pompeo also fails to recognize the stark divide within Islam which undermines almost any statement that begins with "all Muslims." The Islamic world is not a monolithic gang of medieval barbarians seeking to destroy the West. Rather, it's a factionalized region where diverging variants of Islam are currently vying for legitimacy. This is not the only dynamic at play in the Middle East, but it is certainly the most obvious, as evidenced by the stand-off between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the proxy war within Yemen, and the sectarian strife within unstable states such as Iraq. To miss this, one would have to avoid even the most elementary scholarship on Middle Eastern affairs. It appears Mike Pompeo has done exactly that.

Both Bolton and Pompeo have cut their teeth by supporting radical visions of global affairs with little regard for reality or practicality. This is not to say that American military power is useless; it has certain capabilities that are effective in certain circumstances. The U.S. military is best used as a scalpel, not a hammer. The military has been effective in specific objectives such as eliminating and restricting terrorist cells, stabilizing disaster zones with humanitarian aid, and protecting freedom of navigation and maritime trade. It is not, however, an instant cure to anything and everything that may ail the world. Some of the world's most pressing problems can only be managed through dialogue, economic maneuvering, and cooperation with allies. Bolton, Pompeo, and the rest of their jingoistic parade in Washington are neither willing nor able to utilize these tools.

Hence, it is vital that Congress act to pressure the administration to fully staff and fund the State Department, nominate capable leaders, and devise a rational foreign policy. I'll admit that each of these tasks is easier said than done. However, peace for the United States and the rest of the world will require nothing less than peace in this War on Diplomacy.

*Global*

diplomacy, trump



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